What is your parenting style?

Parenting SA

Parents are the most important influence in children's lives. The relationships we have with our children, the values we give them and the example we set have more impact than things like how much money we have or where we live. While there are many different parenting styles, children benefit when parents are warm and loving and provide clear guidance and support. Understanding more about parenting styles and how they affect children can help you work out the kind of parent you want to be.

Being a parent

Raising children can bring great joy as you watch them grow and develop and become their own unique person. There can be challenges too and most families find that parenting is a journey of ups and downs. It can help to remember that:

- there is no such thing as a perfect parent, or one right way to be a parent. A loving relationship with your child is what's important
- each child is an individual with their own temperament and unique qualities. You need to adapt your parenting to meet each child's needs over time
- you are a person as well as a parent. Looking after your own needs makes parenting easier
- all parents need help at times. It's OK to seek advice and support from family, friends and services when you need it.

Most parents learn about parenting 'on the job' and grow into their role with experience. It is important to believe in yourself and have confidence in your parenting.

What influences our parenting?

Our ideas about parenting come from things such as how we were brought up, our life experiences, our culture and religion and what we have read or seen others do. You may have had positive experiences as a child and want to do things the same way your parents did, or you might want to do things differently.

Values

Our parenting is also influenced by our values, whether we realise it or not. We might do things a certain way because of our values – the deepest desires about life that drive us. You might:

- take time to make healthy meals because you value health and wellbeing
- encourage children to do things for themselves because you value responsibility.

You might decide that in your family it is important to:

- show love and kindness
- be patient and fair
- accept each other's differences
- have a safe home with no yelling or hitting.

Parenting together

Parenting will be easier if you work with your child's other parent, whether you live together or not. Talk about what is important to you both and for your family. As time goes on you can think about whether your parenting matches your values. If you value respect for others and then yell at your children or each other, you might ask whether you are living by your values.

Children benefit when parents work together in their parenting.

Parenting style

Studies show that there are four broad parenting styles. Parents may use a mix of these but tend to use one the most. The styles and what they mean for children are below.

Authoritarian style

Authoritarian parents:

- tend to tell children what to do and expect them to obey
- may not give reasons and say 'Because I said so', or 'Just do it'. The aim is obedience rather than helping children learn what is expected
- can be controlling, lack warmth and be overly strict or harsh
- may have limited understanding of children's development and expect them to do things they are not yet able to
- can react based on their own mood rather than the situation or the child's behaviour.

Children raised this way may be quite obedient. They know the rules but may have lower self-worth and happiness and may become defiant or aggressive. They may depend on others to make decisions and be less likely to take on responsibilities or solve problems. Parents can have high expectations of children's learning but may not provide the support children need.

Permissive style

Permissive parents:

- are warm, loving and responsive but provide very little or no discipline or guidance
- may give in to children's demands too often
- tend not to set firm limits, are inconsistent and don't follow through on consequences, e.g. say children can have one hour of TV but not enforce it
- can allow children to behave poorly even when it affects others.

Children may grow up feeling loved but insecure due to the lack of boundaries. They don't learn appropriate behaviour and to be responsible. They may lack self-discipline, have poor social skills and be too self-involved. Parents may not provide the structure and focus that children need to do well at school.

Disengaged style

Disengaged parents:

- take little interest in children, don't pay much attention or get involved in their activities
- may provide for basic needs but don't offer much love, affection or cuddles
- don't tend to set limits or provide structure such as regular bed times. Discipline can be minimal or non-existent.

Children who grow up with disengaged parents are less likely to feel loved and can miss out on the guidance and support they need. They may be socially withdrawn, lack social skills and have problem behaviour. They can feel anxious and stressed from the lack of support. Parents may not have high expectations of their children achieving or even attending school.

Supportive style

Supportive parents:

- are calm, reasonable, predictable and involved
- listen to children, explain and discuss options
- support and guide children's behaviour rather than punish
- allow children to be independent and learn for themselves
- give responsibilities suitable for children's age and ability rather than over-protecting or doing too much for them
- understand children's temperament and stage of development
- respond to situations based on the needs of the child rather than being overrun by their own emotions.

Children who grow up with supportive parents are likely to be more emotionally mature, have better social skills and self-confidence and feel greater happiness and wellbeing. They are supported to do well at school and encouraged to try their best and achieve.

Supportive parenting works best for children. Parents are warm and loving and provide clear guidance and support.

Considering your parenting style

When reflecting on your parenting and how much you use the supportive style, you could ask yourself:

- do I show my children I love them?
- do I really listen to them?
- do I show I understand how they feel?
- do I provide routines, rituals and guidance that help children feel safe and secure?
- am I clear enough about how I want my children to behave? Am I calm when giving feedback about their behaviour?
- is my child able to understand why a behaviour is not acceptable? Can they see how it affects others? Have I helped them work out better ways to get what they need?

Being a supportive parent

These are some of the ways you can use the supportive parenting style.

Build your connection

- Focus on building your relationship with your children.
- Spend time with them individually. Try to see things from their point of view.

Show your love

- Tell children often that you love them. Give hugs and cuddles. Keep showing your love as children get older. Teenagers need to know you love them too.
- Show you genuinely enjoy spending time with your children. Play, laugh and have fun together.
- Be interested in things that interest them. Know what's happening for them, go to their activities or sports and get to know their friends.
- Plan things as a family and celebrate special occasions together.

Children benefit from your full attention. Don't let TVs, phones or other electronic devices get in the way.

Talk and listen

- Talk with children often. This shows you care and helps children sort out their ideas.
- Listen to what they say. Try to work out the feelings behind the words.
- Be relaxed and open. Talk about a wide range of topics including sensitive ones in ways that suit your child's age. Children learn they can talk with you about anything and will be more likely to come to you if they have a problem.
- Let children have a say in family decisions. They may not always get what they want but it shows you value their views.

Research shows that having meals together as a family makes children and teenagers happier and relationships stronger. Turn off the TV, phones and other devices.

Inspire achievement

- Encourage children to have a go at different things that interest them and practice their skills.
- Help them see positive futures for themselves and achieve their goals.
- Encourage their learning at school and through other activities. Provide support when they need it.
- Read books together from a young age, or tell stories if you prefer. It can be a special time of closeness and learning that children remember all their lives.
- Praise their efforts, e.g. 'I see how hard you worked to achieve that' rather than saying 'You're so clever'. Celebrate their successes.

Guide and support

- Children need to know what is OK and not OK. Have reasonable expectations of children's behaviour that suit their age and development. Limits and boundaries help children feel secure.
- Notice when children do well and praise them. This is how they know to keep doing it. Encouragement works better than punishment. When you punish children they feel angry and defensive and focus on these feelings rather than learning the behaviour that is expected.
- Be patient. Young children are yet to develop mastery over their impulses and emotions. They need time to learn and practice.
- Acknowledge children's feelings, e.g. 'you really want to play some more... it's hard to stop when it's time to go home'. They will be more likely to do what you want and it helps maintain your connection with them.
- Showing you understand can open the way to conversation. Say things like 'I'm worried about you. You seem upset/angry about....', or 'It must be really hard to.....'. When children feel understood they are more likely to listen to your advice and guidance.
- Help children express strong feelings in safe ways, e.g. outdoor play, sport, drama, music and writing.

When children feel understood they are more likely to listen to your guidance.

Be a positive role model

- You are a role model for your children whether you realise it or not. Behave in ways you expect your children to behave and treat people the way you want your children to treat others. Live the values you want them to have.
- Help children learn to regulate their emotions by modeling this yourself. Stop and take a deep breath if you are angry or upset. Calm down before you respond. You are showing children that feelings can be managed.

Children benefit when they have a network of trusted adults to talk to, e.g. aunties, uncles, friends or community, sports or activity leaders. Having mentors in their life can broaden children's horizons.

Want more information?

Parent Helpline
Phone1300 364 100
For advice on child health and parenting

Child and Family Health Service (CaFHS)
Phone 1300 733 606, 9am-4.30pm, Mon-Fri for an appointment. See **www.cyh.com** for child health and parenting information

Parenting SA
For more Parent Easy Guides including 'Being a parent', 'New parents', 'Being a Mum', 'Being a Dad', 'Single parenting', 'Blended families', 'Grandparenting', 'Discipline 0-12 years', 'Living with toddlers' and 'Living with young people' www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Raising Children Network
For parenting information www.raisingchildren.net.au

Government of South Australia

Parenting SA
A partnership between the Department for Education and Child Development and the Women's and Children's Health Network.

Ph: 08 8303 1660
www.parenting.sa.gov.au

Parent Easy Guides are free in South Australia.

Important: This information is not intended to replace advice from a qualified practitioner.

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